

Dear,

Senate President Pro Tempore, Tim Ashe
Speaker of the House, Mitzi Johnson
Chair, Senate Judiciary, Richard Sears
Chair, House Judiciary, Maxine Grad
Chair, Senate Government Operations, Jeanette White
Chair, House Government Operations, Sarah Copeland Hanzas
Chair, Senate Agriculture, Robert Starr
Chair, House Government Operations, Carolyn Partridge

We compose this letter in direct response to the excess of bills recently introduced to the Vermont State House and Senate and most specifically bills S.120, S.132, H.496, and S.83. The cosigners of this letter accept as true that the majority of the bills mentioned above are in response to a plethora of race-based incidents that have detrimentally harmed the core and peripheral ethos of Vermont on the micro and macro-system level. However, as a collective, we feel that any response about us without us is incongruous and paradoxical by and large.

Most notable to our collective is bill S.132 constructed by the Office of the Attorney General. It must be officially mentioned, that before the creation of S.132, we attempted to assist the Attorney General's office in the creation of a more comprehensive bill. The New England Area Conference (NEAC), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Arab American Institute made model legislation available for the AG to utilize with the explicit direction to include the voices of those from communities of color in the bill's construction.

Correspondingly, during the structuring of this bill, several co-signers of this letter, most notable former State Representative Kiah Morris herself, asked to review the law to create legislation that "made sense" and did not feel rushed or imbalanced. Those attempts and that advice fell on deaf ears. Instead, the Attorney General's office proposed a bill that smacks of reactionary language and lacks a more profound reflective practice. As a result, all amendments introduced from communities of color derived from situations of duress and not solidarity - we do not support this bill.

As well, S.120 feels contrived and lacking stakeholder perspective. This bill works to reverse worthier work put forth by more succinct coalitions in other laws — the most notable oversight concerns the use of overly inclusive language that perpetuates a culture of erasure. Thus, we also cast a vote of no confidence concerning this proposed bill.

Furthermore, while the creators of H.496 expressed good intent, we feel the bill is fundamentally flawed in regards to its proposed verbiage. For instance, the exchanging the word *hate* to *bias* places people of color and other marginalized groups at risk as it "unbolts the door," letting those in power define and thus persecute based on the majority perception of what *constitutes* bias. It is not an uncommon nor unprecedented practice for the most potent bureaucratic structures to utilize "gray" language to promote their own agenda of at the expense of the disenfranchised. Thus, crafting a weapon with no owner to be used by us or against us.

In addition, great concern was raised regarding S.79, which appears to potentially target and impact migrant workers who sustain farms throughout the state. We are most interested in the protection of the civil rights of all persons who reside in our state and this bill unfairly impacts their lived experiences.

In contrast to those bills, we are in support of S.83, bills concerning the empowerment of the Indigenous community (H.119, H.178 and H.292), and the PR.2 proposal to remove slavery from the Vermont

constitution. Unlike the measures proposed beforehand that missed the mark, these bills express a holistic and well-thought path-forward that allow for future coalitions to build upon collectively alongside the citizen-legislature and Senate.

Lastly, we point out that we feel that the assembly's attention is misallocated at this moment. Instead of creating and adopting legislation to band-aid the ever-growing presence of systemic racism in Vermont, we should invest in the structure already working steadfastly to dismantle racism. Therefore, we officially propose that all bills besides those mentioned in good-standing above be unattached from the backs and subsequently the narratives of people of color. Instead, we ask that you invest in the Human Rights Commission via the addition of two FTE's to provide investigatory and outreach/education and we ask that you support the work set-forth by Act 54 with the specific remembrance to include input from those in the LGBTQ+, disabled, and Muslim communities; and other marginalized communities not before-mentioned in Act 54. While you work on those tasks, please allow us time to work on legislation to propose to your assembly that accurately reflects the views of, concerns, and thought-diversity in our communities.

Respectfully submitted,

Steffen Glenn Gillom, President Windham County NAACP

Tabitha Pohl-Moore, President Rutland Area NAACP

Sha'an Mouliert, Founder, "I am Vermont Too"

Weiwei Wang

LGBTQIA Alliance of Vermont

Ebony Freedom, Black Lives Matter Vermont

Wafic Faour, Founder, Vermonters for Justice in Palestine

Chief Rich Holschuh, Commissioner VT Commission on Native American Affairs

Amanda Garces, Founder, Vermont Coalition for Ethnic and Social Equity in Schools

Curtiss Reed, Director, Vermont Partnership for Fairness and Diversity